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FOR EUR A/S DAN FRIED FROM AMBASSADOR RICHARD GRABER

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR EUR A/S FRIED'S JANUARY 11 VISIT
TO PRAGUE

Classified By: Ambassador Richard W. Graber for Reasons 1.4 B&D

¶1. (C) Dan, I'm looking forward to seeing you again. Your visit will be our first opportunity to meet the "new" Czech government that President Klaus will formally appoint tomorrow (Tuesday) morning. You are set to call on new/old Prime Minister Topolanek, new Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg, and opposition leader (and former PM) Paroubek. You will also have time with your old friend Sasha Vondra, who tomorrow gets promoted from ForMin to Deputy PM for European Affairs. Your visit is a great opportunity to demonstrate U.S. interest in the Czech Republic, express our appreciation for Czech support in the fight against terrorism and in democracy promotion, and solicit GOCR commitment at the highest levels in these on-going strategic arenas. Your stop in Prague is particularly timely given that a decision on missile defense is expected soon, and given the Czechs' intense focus on possible revisions to the visa waiver program. We also hope you will use the opportunity to remind the government not to lose sight of the importance of foreign policy issues as it sorts out its domestic political situation. With the Czech Republic due to take over the EU Presidency in the first half of 2009, the sooner the Czechs can balance their domestic and external priorities the better for both the EU and the USG.

-- Political situation --

¶2. (C) President Klaus will appoint the second Topolanek government on the morning of January 9. PM Topolanek, whose minority government has been in power since September, despite losing its vote of confidence in October, will head a three-party coalition of his center-right ODS with the Greens and Christian Democrats. A vote of confidence is likely this month, perhaps as early as next week. While chances for success are only fifty-fifty at best, we expect that the government appointed tomorrow, like its predecessor, will govern the country for several months. If this government also fails, we expect the third attempt to form a government will be even more protracted than the first two. What is noteworthy is that despite the absence of a confirmed government since the June 2006 elections, Czech democratic institutions continue to function, the private sector continues to thrive, and the government remains committed to key external commitments such as foreign deployments. Czech foreign and security policies remain firmly transatlantic, although the Czechs (with the notable exception of the President) are also committed to the EU. Support for democracy promotion and human rights is a hallmark of Czech foreign policy, and incoming FM Schwarzenberg will only strengthen this commitment. In particular, the Czechs have been outspoken in support of democratic transition in Cuba and staked out their strongest claim within the EU on Cuba. As you know, with the exception of visas, we have excellent bilateral relations with the Czechs.

-- Visas --

13. (SBU) Outgoing FM Vondra and Czech Ambassador in Washington Kolar have been the two leading voices in the Czech quest to enter the visa waiver program. When he took office in the fall Vondra launched a coordinated effort of new EU member states (the so-called Coalition for Visa Equality) to lobby Congress for a political route to VWP status. While convinced that the only path to VWP status runs through a political solution, Vondra and the MFA have agreed that we need to continue to work on the technical aspects of border security, and that the Bilateral Consular Working Group is therefore important to continue. Vondra and I chaired the fall meeting of the BCWG in late November. The Czechs were understandably pleased with the President's announcement in Tallinn, and are looking forward to the visit to Prague in late January of DHS Acting A/S Rosenzweig. The Czechs are arranging a meeting in Prague with all VWP roadmap countries during Rosenzweig's visit. The Czechs have high hopes that the Democratic Congress will be more supportive of new VWP requirements. It will be important during your meetings and press statements to deliver a clear message that does not inflate expectations.

-- Missile Defense --

14. (C) The Czech Republic remains keen on hosting a missile defense facility. PM Topolanek and Vondra have been strong proponents, while opposition leader Paroubek (CSSD) has given explicit support for a radar site only, insisting that an interceptor site would require a referendum. FM-designate Schwarzenberg has not taken a firm stand on the topic, so your meeting will be a chance to shape his views. The MFA generally, and in particular Deputy FM Pojar, have been very

PRAGUE 00000022 002 OF 003

strong on MD, and very clear that they support a base because they believe it to be in the Czechs' interests, not because they expect anything in return (unfortunately Pojar will be out of Prague during your visit, accompanying President Klaus on a visit to Bratislava). In the months surrounding the June 2006 general elections, there was significant noise from a "No to Bases" campaign and from politicians seeking to turn public discomfort with the possible presence of foreign troops on Czech soil into short term-political gains. More recently, MD has not been a point of contention in the government-formation process and public interest in the issues appears to be waning. The most recent polling data indicates growing, if modest, public support for hosting a radar facility: 59% support hosting a radar facility while 28% support hosting interceptors. Topolanek and Vondra are well aware that a split decision is likely, and they fully support this (indeed, Vondra has said this is the best outcome, since it will place U.S. installations in two Central European states rather than one). You will find the Czechs most interested in making sure that a decision is properly handled, so that the government has time to inform all the key players in Parliament before they read about it in the press.

-- Foreign Deployments --

15. (C) IRAQ: The Czech Republic is an original member of Operation Iraqi Freedom and was at one time the fourth largest contributor of troops to Iraq. From December 2003 to December 2006, the Czech Army deployed approximately 100 military police in Basra to train an estimated 12,000 Iraqi police and security forces. In December 2006, in coordination with the British, the Czech military police concluded this mission and relocated to a base near the Basra airport to assume new duties, which largely involve force protection. The Czechs have also participated in the Multinational Security Transition Command and NATO Training Mission-Iraq to help create security infrastructures in Iraq. They sent six military police trainers to the NATO facility

in Baghdad and contributed \$200,000 to the Trust Fund to support this mission. The Czech Parliament recently extended the troop mandate for Iraq through 2007.

¶6. (C) AFGHANISTAN: The Czech cabinet approved on December 20 the plan for a Czech-led PRT in Afghanistan. They will take over from Hungary, which plans to leave Pol-e-Khomri in October 2008. The MFA has decided to wait until a needs assessment is complete before seeking additional international partners. The January 26 NATO Foreign Ministers' meeting will be important in determining the level of ISAF capabilities and flexibilities needed to accomplish the Czech PRT mission (and since this will be FM Schwarzenberg's first NATO meeting, your discussion this week will be important in shaping the Czech stance at that important ministerial). You should also know that Lt. General Karl Eikenberry, Commander, Combined Forces Comand-Afghanistan, will be in Prague for consultations on January 22-23.

¶7. (C) BALKANS: The Czech Republic strongly supports USG policy in Kosovo and Serbia, and the Balkans are the Czech Republic's most important security priority. There are currently almost 600 Czech troops in Kosovo under NATO command, and an additional 60 troops are serving with EU forces in Bosnia. The Czechs support resolving Kosovo's final status as soon as possible after the January 2007 Serbian elections, and will support Attisaari's recommendations. The Czechs continue to urge the EU to keep the prospects of EU membership alive for Serbia, while emphasizing the importance of full ICTY compliance as a precondition for restarting talks. Note that you may find former PM Paroubek outspoken on needing to protect the rights of Kosovar Serbs, but his personal views have not had any particular impact on Czech policies, which have strongly supported the Contact Group and the EU.

-- Transformational Diplomacy --

¶8. (SBU) The Czech Republic believes it has a moral obligation to help those struggling to be free based on its own peaceful transition to democracy. They also recognize the security benefits of promoting democracy and human rights in troubled regions. Consequently the GOCR's approach to transformational diplomacy is three-pronged: (1) traditional diplomatic efforts (bilateral and through the EU), usually in close cooperation with the USG; (2) democracy capacity building projects; (3) humanitarian aid. In 2004, the MFA created the Transformation Cooperation Unit (TRANS) to fund capacity building projects that complement Czech diplomatic efforts to promote democracy. TRANS is modeled on the U.S.

PRAGUE 0000022 003 OF 003

National Endowment for Democracy. In 2006, TRANS funded projects in Cuba, Belarus, Iraq, Burma, Bosnia, Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. People in Need, the largest NGO in Central Europe, is often TRANS' implementing partner on the ground. U.S. public and private groups have worked closely with People in Need and TRANS. Our bilateral cooperation on transformational diplomacy extends as well to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, which has called Prague its home since 1995. The Czechs have paid a price for this, including suffering a trade embargo by Iran in retaliation for the Prague-based Radio Farda broadcasts. But the Czech government remains committed to the Radios' mission, and last year presented Secretary Rice with a \$1 million donation to assist with RFE/RL's move to a new, more secure, headquarters in 2008.

GRABER